



**Montana Fish,  
Wildlife & Parks**

July 12, 2001

1420 East 6th Ave.  
P.O. Box 200701  
Helena, MT 59620-0701

Environmental Quality Council  
Montana Department of Environmental Quality  
Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks  
    Fisheries Division  
    Endangered Species Coordinator  
    Nongame Coordinator  
    Native Species Coordinator, Fisheries  
    Missoula Office  
Montana State Library, Helena  
MT Environmental Information Center  
Montana Audubon Council  
North Powell Conservation District, 91 North Frontage Road, Deer Lodge, MT 59722  
U.S. Army Corp of Engineers, Helena  
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Helena  
State Historic Preservation Office, Helena  
Greg Neudecker, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 922 Bootlegger Trail, Great Falls, MT 59404  
Mr. Ted Murphy, Ovando, MT 59854

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Please find enclosed an Environmental Assessment prepared for a Future Fisheries Project tentatively planned to restore a 1.5 mile reach of Warren Creek. The proposed project is located approximately 0.75 miles south of the town of Ovando in Powell County.

Please submit any comments that you have by 5 P.M., August 13, 2001 to the Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks in Helena at the address listed above. If you have any questions, feel free to contact me at (406) 444-2432.

Sincerely,

Mark Lere, Program Officer  
Habitat Protection Bureau  
Fisheries Division  
e-mail: mlere@state.mt.us

**ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT**  
Fisheries Division  
Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks  
Warren Creek Channel Restoration Project

General Purpose: The 1995 Montana Legislature enacted statute 87-1-272 through 273 that directs the Department to administer a Future Fisheries Improvement Program. The program involves physical projects to restore degraded fish habitat in rivers and lakes for the purposes of improving wild fisheries. The legislature established an earmarked funding account to help accomplish this goal. Additionally, the 1999 Montana Legislature amended statute sections 87-1-273, 15-38-202 and Section 5, Chapter 463, Laws of 1995 to create a bull trout and cutthroat trout enhancement program. The program calls for the enhancement of bull trout and cutthroat trout through habitat restoration, natural reproduction and reductions in species competition by way of the Future Fisheries Program. This project is being proposed to restore a 1.5 mile reach of Warren Creek by re-constructing the channel to a proper morphology, improving fish passage by re-constructing an irrigation diversion that currently acts as a barrier, and removing a corral system off of the active Warren Creek channel. The project site, involving oversight by personnel from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, is located on property owned by Mr. Ted Murphy approximately 0.75 miles south of the town of Ovando in Powell County (Attachment 1).

I. Location of Project: This project will be conducted on Warren Creek, a tributary to the Blackfoot River, located approximately 0.75 miles south of the town of Ovando within Township 15 North, Range 12 West, Sections 33 and 34 in Powell County.

II. Need for the Project: One goal within Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks six-year operations plan for the fisheries program is to "restore and enhance degraded habitats" by implementing the Future Fisheries Improvement Program to restore important habitats on public and private lands. This proposed channel restoration project would help achieve this goal.

Approximately 40 years ago, this reach of Warren Creek was altered in an attempt to increase forage production, improve irrigation and route the stream through a corral system to provide water for livestock. This past work, to the detriment of fish and wildlife resources, involved stream channelization, creation of a fish passage barrier and the clearing of woody riparian vegetation. This project proposes to return the channelized stream to the historic channel and by-pass a corral system; re-construct an irrigation diversion structure to provide for fish passage; and develop off-site water for livestock. Warren Creek supports westslope cutthroat trout, a species of special concern in Montana, as well as rainbow trout and brown trout.

III. Scope of the Project:

The project proposes to restore a 1.5 mile reach of Warren Creek (Attachment 2). The proposal calls for returning the channelized reach of Warren Creek to the historic channel, re-constructing the diversion structure to provide for fish passage, and installing fish habitat structures. Habitat structures would include woody debris utilized as submerged shelter and bank-placed root wads. Some rock would be utilized as bank-placed boulders. This project is expected to cost \$70,625.00. Of this total, the Future Fisheries

Improvement Program would be contributing up to \$20,000.00.

IV. Environmental Impact Checklist:

Please see attached checklist.

V. Explanation of Impacts to the Physical Environment

1. Terrestrial and aquatic life and habitats.

Restoration of the existing channel is expected to create a healthier habitat for aquatic life by increasing aquatic diversity and restoring fish passage to up to an additional nine miles of stream channel. Improvements in the aquatic habitat are expected to enhance resident trout populations in Warren Creek, as well as increase the recruitment of wild fish to the Blackfoot River. Habitat for riparian dependent wildlife also would be improved by using the historic channel to by-pass a corral system and by installing fencing along the riparian corridor.

2. Water quantity, quality and distribution.

Short-term increases in turbidity will occur during project construction. To minimize turbidity, construction will occur during a low flow period and operation of equipment in the stream channel will be minimized to the extent practicable. Additionally, the channel restoration work would be conducted "in the dry" and, when completed, water would be turned in on an incremental basis. The Department of Environmental Quality will be contacted to determine narrative conditions required to meet short-term water quality standards and protect aquatic biota. A 310 permit will be obtained from the local Conservation District and the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers will be contacted for requirements needed to meet the federal Clean Water Act (404 permit). In the long term, by-passing the corral system, installation of riparian fencing and off-channel water development will improve the overall quality of downstream waters.

3. Geology and soil quality, stability and moisture.

Soils along the stream margin would be disturbed during project construction, but would stabilize quickly following proposed re-vegetation and stream channel restoration efforts. Overall, the project is expected to reduce bank erosion and improve channel stability.

4. Vegetation cover, quantity and quality.

Riparian vegetation and cover would be disturbed during the period of construction. However, re-vegetation efforts, in conjunction with riparian fencing and removal of an on-channel corral system, would result in an overall improvement to the riparian vegetative community.

5. Aesthetics.

Aesthetics would be enhanced by restoring a channelized reach of stream to a more healthy and

natural stream environment. Aesthetics would be further enhanced by the removal of a corral system from the active channel.

7. Unique, endangered, fragile, or limited environmental resources

Warren Creek supports westslope cutthroat trout, a species of special concern in Montana. Restoration of the stream channel is expected to improve habitat for westslope cutthroat trout by returning the channel to a proper dimension, pattern and profile and by adding habitat complexity in the form of pools and overhead cover. Additionally, re-construction of the irrigation diversion, currently acting as a migration barrier, is expected to open up to an additional nine miles of stream channel for spawning and rearing.

9. Historic and archaeological sites

The proposed project likely will require an individual Army Corp of Engineers 404 permit. Therefore, the State Historic Preservation Office will be contacted to determine the need for compliance with the federal historic preservation regulations. The project will not begin until a cultural clearance is granted.

VI. Explanation of Impacts on the Human Environment.

7. Access to & quality of recreational activities.

It is anticipated that the restoration of this reach of Warren Creek would improve overall aquatic habitat and, as a result, would enhance resident trout populations, as well as fish populations migrating from the Blackfoot River. Consequently, the project is expected to improve the recreational fishery in both the stream and in the Blackfoot River.

VII. Discussion and Evaluation of Reasonable Alternatives.

1. No Action Alternative

If no action is taken, this reach of Warren Creek will remain in a straightened, ditched channel that will continue to lack fish habitat. In addition, the irrigation diversion structure will remain a migration barrier to westslope cutthroat trout and other fish species. The corral system surrounding the active channel will continue to impair water quality. Recreational opportunities associated with fish and wildlife resources will remain reduced, habitat for riparian dependent wildlife will remain in a degraded condition and aesthetics will continue to be impaired.

2. The Proposed Alternative

The proposed alternative is designed to restore a 1.5 mile channelized reach of Warren Creek by returning the stream to the historic channel, re-constructing an irrigation diversion to allow for fish passage, by-passing the active channel away from a system of corrals and developing off channel water for livestock. These activities will create a more diverse stream channel, resulting in a

healthier habitat for aquatic life. This alternative would improve fish and wildlife habitat, aesthetics and water quality within the project area and would be expected to increase trout populations in both Warren Creek and the Blackfoot River.

VIII. Environmental Assessment Conclusion Section

1. Is an EIS required? No.

We conclude from this review that the proposed activities will have a positive impact on the physical and human environment.

2. Level of public involvement.

The proposed project was reviewed and supported by the public review panel of the Future Fisheries Improvement Program. The proposed project also was reviewed and approved by the Fish, Wildlife and Parks Commission. The Environmental Assessment (EA) is being distributed to all individuals and groups listed on the cover letter. The EA also will be published on Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks web page: [fwp.state.mt.us](http://fwp.state.mt.us).

3. Duration of comment period?

Public comment will be accepted through 5 P.M. on August 13, 2001.

4. Person responsible for preparing the EA.

Mark Lere, Program Officer  
Habitat Protection Bureau  
Fisheries Division  
Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks  
1420 East 6th Avenue  
Helena, MT 59620

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MONTANA DEPARTMENT OF FISH, WILDLIFE AND PARKS  
1420 E 6th Ave, PO BOX 200701, Helena, MT 59620-0701  
(406) 444-2535

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Title Warren Creek Channel Restoration Project

Division/Bureau Fisheries Division -Future Fisheries Improvement  
Description of Project The project is being proposed to restore a 1.5 mile reach of Warren Creek by returning a channelized reach of stream to the historic channel; re-constructing an irrigation diversion to provide for fish passage; and by-passing a corral system with the new channel. The project site, involving property owned by Mr. Ted Murphy, is located approximately 0.75 mile south of the town of Ovando in Powell County. The project will be overseen by personnel from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

POTENTIAL IMPACT ON PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

	MAJOR	MODERATE	MINOR	NONE	UNKNOWN	COMMENTS ON ATTACHED PAGES
1. Terrestrial & aquatic life and habitats			X			X
2. Water quality, quantity & distribution			X			X
3. Geology & soil quality, stability & moisture			X			X
4. Vegetation cover, quantity & quality			X			X
5. Aesthetics			X			X
6. Air quality				X		
7. Unique, endangered, fragile, or limited environmental resources			X			X
8. Demands on environmental resources of land, water, air & energy				X		
9. Historical & archaeological sites				X		X

POTENTIAL IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

	MAJOR	MODERATE	MINOR	NONE	UNKNOWN	COMMENTS ON ATTACHED PAGES
1. Social structures & mores				X		
2. Cultural uniqueness & diversity				X		
3. Local & state tax base & tax revenue				X		
4. Agricultural or industrial production				X		
5. Human health				X		
6. Quantity & distribution of community & personal income				X		
7. Access to & quality of recreational and wilderness activities			X			X
8. Quantity & distribution of employment				X		
9. Distribution & density of population & housing				X		
10. Demands for government services				X		
11. Industrial & commercial activity				X		
12. Demands for energy				X		
13. Locally adopted environmental plans & goals				X		
14. Transportation networks & traffic flows				X		

Other groups or agencies contacted or which may have overlapping

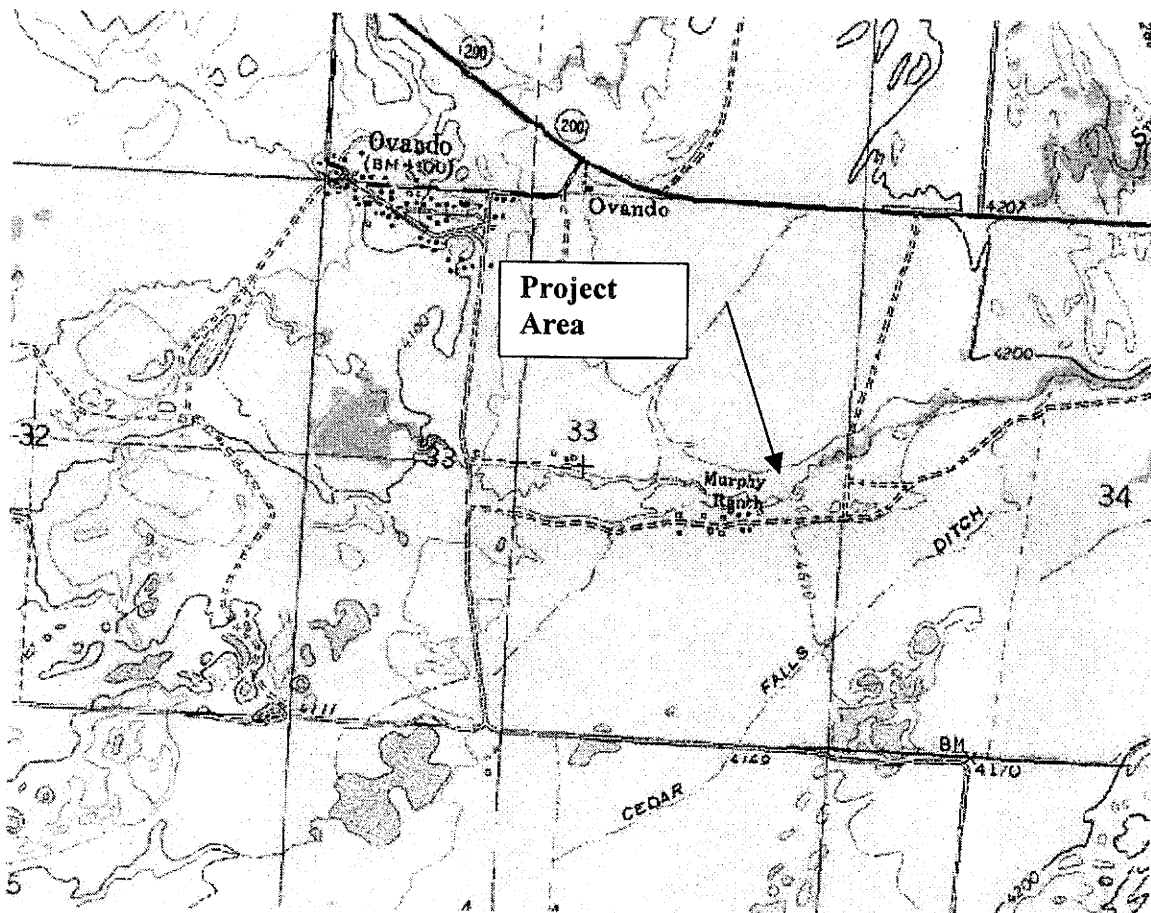
jurisdiction North Powell Conservation District, NRCS, US Fish and  
Wildlife Service, US Army Corp of Engineers, Montana Department of  
Environmental Quality, State Historic Preservation Office  
Individuals or groups contributing to this EA Greg Neudecker, U.S.  
Fish and Wildlife Service; Water Consulting, Inc.

Recommendation concerning preparation of EIS No EIS required.

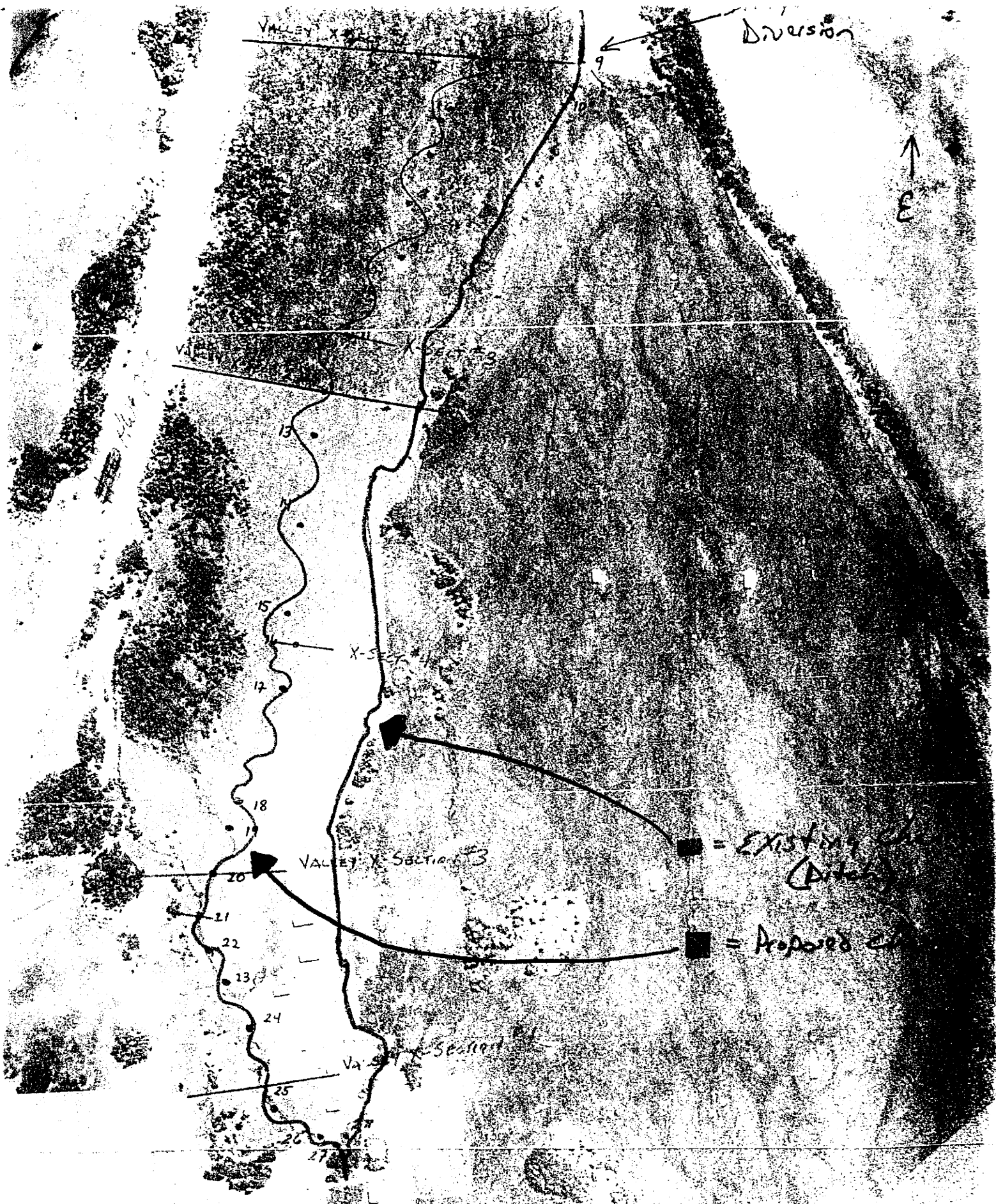
EA prepared by : Mark Lere

Date: July 12, 2001





Attachment 1. Map of Warren Creek showing project area.



ATTACHMENT 2. Plan view of proposed channel restoration on Warren Creek.